

The Green Pea Pirates

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"Webster—Man's Man,"
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CHAPTER X—Continued.

"There's one thing more that we mustn't neglect," warned Mr. Gibney before the meeting broke up. "We've got to run this little vessel into some dog-hole where there's a nice beach and smooth water, and change her name. I notice that her old name Reina Maria is screwed into her bows and across her stern in raised gilt letters, contrary to law and custom. We'll snip 'em off, sandpaper every spot where there's a letter, and repaint it; after which we'll rig up a stagin' over her bow and stern, and cut her new name, 'Maggie II,' right into her plankin'. Nobody'll ever suspect her name's been changed. I notice that the official letters and numbers cut into her main beam is F-C-P—9857. I'll change the F to E, and the C to O, and the P to R. A handy man with a wood chisel can do lots of things. He can change those nines to eights, the five to a six, and the seven to a nine. I've seen it done before. Then we'll rig a foretopmast and a spinnaker boom on her, and bend a fisherman's staysail. Nothing like it when you're sailing a little off the wind. Scraggs, you have the papers of the old Maggie, and we all have our licenses regular enough. Dig up the old papers, Scraggs, and I'll doctor 'em up to fit the Maggie II. As for our armament, we'll dismount the guns and stow 'em away in the hold until we get down on the Colombian coast, and while we're lying in Panama repairing the holes where my shots went through her, and puttin' new planks in her decks where the old plankin' has been scored by shrapnel, those parakeets will think we're as peaceful as chipmunks. Better look over your supplies, McGuffey, and see if there's any paint aboard. I'd just as lief give the old girl a different dress before we drop anchor in Panama."

"Gib," said Captain Scraggs, earnestly. "I'll keel-haul and shull-drag the man that says you ain't got a great head."

"By the lord," supplemented McGuffey. "you have."

The commodore smiled and tapped his frontal bone with his forefinger. "Imagination, my lads, imagination," he said, and reached for the last of the punch.

Exactly three weeks from the date of the naval battle which took place off the Coronado islands, and whereby Mr. Gibney became commodore and managing owner of the erstwhile Mexican coast patrol schooner Reina Maria, that vessel sailed out of the harbor of Panama completely rejuvenated.

Mr. Gibney had her painted a creamy white with a dark blue waterline. She had had her bottom cleaned and scraped and the copper sheathing overhauled and patched up. Her sails had been overhauled, inspected, and repaired wherever necessary, and in order to be on the safe side, Mr. Gibney, upon motion duly made by him and seconded by McGuffey (to whom the seconding of the Gibney motions had developed into a habit), purchased an extra suit of new sails. The engines were overhauled by the faithful McGuffey and a large store of distillate stored in the hold. Captain Scraggs, with his old-time aversion to expense, made a motion (which was seconded by McGuffey before he had taken time to consider its import) providing for the abolition of the office of chief engineer while the Maggie II was under sail, at which time the chief ex-officio was to hold himself under the orders of the commodore and be transferred to the deck department if necessary. Mr. Gibney approved the measure and it went into effect. Only on entering or leaving a port, or in case of chase by an enemy, were the engines to be used, and McGuffey was warned to be extremely saving of his distillate.

Mr. Gibney made a splendid job of changing the vessel's name, and as she chugged lazily out of Panama bay and lifted to the long ground-swell of the Pacific, it is doubtful if even her late Mexican commander would have recognized her. She was indeed a beautiful craft, and Commodore Gibney's heart swelled with pride as he stood aft, conning the man at the wheel, and looked her over. It seemed like a sacrilege now, when he reflected how he had trained the gun of the old Maggie on her that day off the Cor-

nados, and it seemed to him now even a greater sacrilege to have brazenly planned to enter her as a privateer in the struggles of the republic of Colombia. The past tense is used advisedly, for that project was now entirely off, much to the secret delight of Captain Scraggs, who, if the hero of one naval engagement, was not anxious to take part in another. In Panama the freebooters of the Maggie II learned that during Mr. Gibney's absence on his filibustering trip the Colombian revolutionists had risen and struck their blow. After the fashion of a hot-headed and impetuous people, they had entered the contest absolutely untrained. As a result, the war had lasted just two weeks, the leaders had been incontinently shot, and the white-winged dove of peace had once more spread her pinions along the borders of the Gold coast.

Commodore Gibney was disgusted beyond measure, and at a special meeting of the syndicate, called in the cabin of the Maggie II that same evening, it was finally decided that they should embark on an indefinite trading cruise in the South seas, or until such time as it seemed their services must be required to free a downtrodden people from a tyrant's yoke.

Captain Scraggs and McGuffey had never been in the South seas, but they had heard that a fair margin of profit was to be wrung from trade in copra, shell, coconuts, and kindred tropical products. They so expressed themselves. To this suggestion, however, Commodore Gibney waved a deprecating paw.

"Legitimate tradin', boys," he said. "Is a nice, sane, healthy business, but the profits is slow. What we want is quick profits, and while it ain't set down in black and white, one of the principal objects of this syndicate is to lead a life of wild adventure. In tradin', there ain't no adventure to speak of. We ought to do a little black-birdin', or raid some of those Jap pearl fisheries off the northern coast of Formosa."

"But we'll be chased by real gunboats if we do that," objected Captain Scraggs. "Those Jap gunboats shoot to kill. Can't you think of somethin' else, Gib?"

"Well," said Mr. Gibney, "for a starter, I can. Suppose we just head straight for Kandavu island in the Fijis, and scheme around for a cargo of black coral? It's only worth about fifty dollars a pound. Kandavu lays somewhere in latitude 22 south, longitude 178 west, and when I was there last it was fair reekin' with cannibal savages. But there's tons of black coral there, and nobody's ever been able to sneak in and get away with it. Every time a boat used to land at Kandavu, the native niggers would have a white-man stew down on the beach, and it's got so that skippers give the island a wide berth."

"Gib, my dear boy," chattered Captain Scraggs, "I'm a man of peace and I—"

"Scraggsy, old stek-in-the-mud," said Mr. Gibney, laying an affectionate hand on the skipper's shoulder, "you're nothin' of the sort. You're a fightin' terantula, and nobody knows it better'n Adelbert P. Gibney. I've seen you in action, Scraggsy. Remember that. It's all right for you to say you're a man of peace and advise me and McGuffey to keep out of the track of trouble, but we know that away down low you're goin' around lookin' for blood, and that once you're up agin the enemy, you never bat an eyelash. Eh, McGuffey?"

McGuffey nodded; whereupon, Captain Scraggs, making but a poor effort to conceal the pleasure which Mr. Gibney's rude compliment afforded him, turned to the rail, glanced seaward, and started to walk away to attend to some trifling detail connected with the boat falls.

"All right, Gib, my lad," he said, affecting to resign himself to the inevitable, "have it your own way. You're a commodore and I'm only a plain captain, but I'll follow wherever you lead. I'll go as far as the next man and we'll glom that black coral if we have to slaughter every man, woman and child on the island. Only, when we're scizzlin' in a pot don't you up and say I never warned you, because I did. How d'ye propose intimidatin' the natives, Gib?"

"Scraggsy," said the commodore, solemnly, "we've waged a private war agin a friendly nation, licked 'em and helped ourselves to their ship. We've changed her name and rig and her official number and letters and we're sailin' under bogus papers. That makes us pirates, and that old Maggie burgee floatin' at the fore ain't nothin' more nor less than the Jolly Roger. All right! Let's be pirates. Who cares? When we slip into M'galao harbor we'll invite the king and his head men aboard for dinner. We'll get 'em drunk, clap 'em in double irons, and surrender 'em to their weepin' subjects when they've filled the hold of the Maggie II with black coral. If they refuse to come aboard we'll shell the bush with that long gun and the Maxim rapid-fire guns we've got below decks. That'll scare 'em so they'll leave us alone and we can help ourselves to the coral."

Scraggs' cold blue eyes glistened. "Lord, Gib," he murmured, "you've got a head."

"Like playin' post-office," was McGuffey's comment.

The commodore smiled. "I thought you boys would see it that way. Now tomorrow I'm going ashore to buy three divin' outfits and lay in a big stock of provisions for the voyage. In the meantime, while the carpenters are gettin' the ship into shape, we'll leave the first mate in charge while we go ashore and have a good time. I've seen worse places than Panama."

As a result of this conference Mr. Gibney's suggestions were acted upon, and they contrived to make their brief stay in Panama very agreeable. They inspected the work on the canal, marveled at the stupendous engineering in the Culebra Cut, drank a little, gambled a little. McGuffey whipped a bartender. He was ordered arrested, and six spiggoty little policemen, sent to arrest him, were also thrashed. The reserves were called out and a riot ensued. Mr. Gibney, following the motto of the syndicate, i. e.,

All for one and one for all—stand, divided we fall,

mixed in conflict and presently found himself in danger vile. Captain Scraggs luckily forgot the motto and escaped, but inasmuch as he was on hand next morning to pay a fine of thirty pesos levied against each of the culprits, he was instantly forgiven. Mr. Gibney vowed that if a United States cruiser didn't happen to be lying in the roadstead, he would have shelled the town in retaliation.

But eventually the days passed, and the Maggie II, well found and ready for sea, shook out her sails to a fair breeze and sailed away for Kandavu. She kept well to the southwest until she struck the southeast trades, when she swung around on her course, headed straight for her destination. It was a pleasant voyage, devoid of incident, and the health of all hands was excellent. Mr. Gibney took daily observations, and was particular to make daily entries in his log when he, Scraggs, and McGuffey were not playing cribbage, a game of which all three were passionately fond.

On the afternoon of the twenty-ninth day after leaving Panama the lookout reported land. Through his glasses Mr. Gibney made out a cluster of tall



They Rubbed Noses Very Solemnly.

palms at the southerly end of the island, and as the schooner held lazily on her course he could discern the white breakers foaming over the reefs that guarded the entrance to the harbor.

"That's Kandavu, all right," announced the commodore. "I was there in '89 with Bill McGinty in the schooner Dashin' Wave. There's the entrance to the harbor, with the Esk reefs to the north and the Pearl reefs to the south. The channel's very narrow—not more than three cables, if it's that, but there's plenty of water and a good muddy bottom that'll hold. McGuffey, lad, better run below and tune up your engines. It's too dangerous a passage on an ebb-tide for a sailin' vessel, so we'll run in under the power. Scraggsy, stand by and when I give the word have your crew shorten sail."

Within a few minutes a long white streak opened up in the wake of the schooner, announcing that McGuffey's engines were doing duty, and a nice breeze springing up two points aft the beam, the Maggie heeled over and fairly flew through the water. Mr. Gibney smiled an ecstatic smile as he took the wheel and guided the schooner through the channel. He rounded her up in twelve fathoms, and within five minutes every stitch of canvas was clewed down hard and fast. The sun was setting as they dropped anchor, and Mr. Gibney had lanterns hung along the sail so that it would be impossible for any craft to approach the schooner and board her without being seen. Also the watch on deck that night carried Mauser rifles, six-shooters, and cutlasses. Mr. Gibney was taking no chances.

CHAPTER XI.

"Now, boys," announced Commodore Gibney, as he sat at the head of the officers' mess at breakfast next morning, "there'll be a lot of canoes paddling off to visit us within the hour, so whatever you do, don't allow more than two of these cannibals aboard the schooner at the same time. Make 'em keep their weapons in the canoes with 'em, and at the first sign of trouble shoot 'em down like dogs. It may be that these precautions ain't necessary, but when I was here twenty years ago it was all the rage to kill a white man and eat him. Maybe times has changed, but the harbor and the coast looks just as wild and lonely as they ever did, and I didn't see no sign of missionary when we dropped hook last night. So don't take no chances."

All hands promised that they would take extreme care, to the end that their precious persons might remain intact, so Mr. Gibney finished his cup of coffee at a gulp and went on deck.

The Kandavu aborigines were not long in putting in an appearance. Even as Mr. Gibney came on deck half a dozen canoes shot out from the beach. Mr. Gibney immediately piped all hands on deck, armed them, and nonchalantly awaited the approach of what might or might not turn out to be an enemy.

When the flotilla was within pistol shot of the schooner Mr. Gibney stepped to the rail and motioned them back. Immediately the natives ceased paddling, and a wild-looking fellow stood up in the forward canoe. After the manner of his kind he had all his life soused his head in lime-water when making his savage toilette, and as a result his shock of black hair stood on end and bulged out like a crowded hayrick. He was naked, of course, and in his hand he held a huge war club.

"That feller'd eat a rattlesnake," gasped Captain Scraggs. "Shoot him, Gib. If he bats an eye."

"Shut up," said the commodore, a trifle testily; "that's the number-one nigger, who does the talkin'. Hello, boy."

"Hello, cap'n," replied the savage, and salaamed gravely. "You likee buy chicken, buy pig? Maybe you say come board, I talk. Me very good friend white master."

"Bless my sweet-scented soul!" gasped the commodore. "What won't them missionaries do next? Cut off my ears if this nigger ain't civilized!" He beckoned to the canoe and it shot alongside, and its brown crew came climbing over the rail of the Maggie II.

Mr. Gibney met the spokesman at the rail and they rubbed noses very solemnly, after the manner of salutation in Kandavu. Captain Scraggs bustled forward, full of importance. "Interduce me, Gib," he said amiably, and then, while Mr. Gibney favored him with a sour glance, Captain Scraggs stuck out his hand and shook briskly with the native.

"Happy to make your acquaintance," he said. "Scraggs is my name, sir. Shake hands with McGuffey, our chief engineer. Hope you left all the folks at home well. What'd you say your name was?"

The islander hadn't said his name was anything, but he grinned now and replied that it was Tabu-Tabu.

"Well, my bucko," muttered McGuffey, who always drew the color line, "I'm glad to hear that. But you ain't the only thing that's taboo around this packet. You can jest check that war club with the first mate, pendin' our better acquaintance. Hand it over, you black beggar, or I'll hit you a swat in the ear that'll hurt all your relations. And hereafter, Scraggsy, just keep your nigger friends to yourself. I ain't waxin' effusive over this savage, and it's agin my principles ever to shake hands with a colored man. This chap's a d-d ugly customer, and you take my word for it."

Tabu-Tabu grinned again, winked to the rail, and tossed his war club down into the canoe.

"Me good missionary boy," he said, rather humbly.

"McGuffey, my dear boy," protested Captain Scraggs, "don't be so doggone rude. You might hurt this poor lad's feelin's. Of course he's only a simple native nigger, but even a dawg has feelin's. You—"

"A-r-r-rh!" snarled McGuffey.

"You two belay talkin' and snappin' at each other," commanded Mr. Gibney, "an' leave all bargainin' to me. This boy is all right and we'll get along first rate if you two just haul ship and do somethin' useful besides buttin' in on your superior officer. Come along, Tabu-Tabu. Makee little eat down in cabin. You takee captain."

"Gib, my dear boy," sputtered Captain Scraggs, bursting with curiosity, following the commodore's reappearance on deck, "whatever's in the wind?"

"Money—fortune," said Mr. Gibney, solemnly.

McGuffey edged up and eyed the commodore seriously. "Sure there ain't a little fightin' mixed up in it?" he asked.

"Not a bit of it," replied Mr. Gibney. "You're as safe on Kandavu as if you was in church. This Tabu kid is sort of prime minister to the king, with a

heap of influence at court. The crew of a British cruiser stole him for a galley police when he was a kid, and he got civilized and learned to talk English. He was a cannibal in them days, but the chaplain aboard showed him how foolish it was to do such things, and finally Tabu-Tabu got religion and asked as a special favor to be allowed to return to Kandavu to civilize his people. As a result of Tabu-Tabu's efforts, he tells me the king has concluded that when he eats a white man he's flyin' in the face of his own interests, and most generally a gunboat comes along in a few months and shells the bush, and—well, anyhow, there ain't been a barbecue on Kandavu for ten years. It's a capital crime to eat a man now, and punishable by bollin' the offender alive in palm oil."

"Well," rumbled McGuffey, "this Tabu-Tabu don't look much like a preacher, if you ask me. But how about this black coral?"

"Oh, I've ribbed up a deal with him," said Mr. Gibney. "He'll see that we get all the trade we can log away. We're the first vessel that's touched here in two years, and they have a thunderin' lot of stuff on hand, Tabu's gone ashore to talk the king into doin' business with us. If he consents, we'll have him and Tabu-Tabu and three or four of the subchiefs aboard for dinner, or else he'll invite us ashore for a big feed, and we'll have to go."

"Supposin' the king don't care to have any truck with us?" inquired McGuffey, anxiously.

"In that case, Mac," replied the commodore with a smile, "we'll just naturally shell him out of house and home."

"Well, then," said McGuffey, "let's get the guns ready. Somethin' tells me these people ain't to be trusted, and I'm tellin' you right now, Gib, I won't sleep well tonight unless them two quarter gatlings and the Maxim-Vickers rapid-fire guns is mounted and ready for business."

"All right, Mac," replied Mr. Gibney, in the tone one uses when humoring a baby. "Set 'em up if it'll make you feel more cheerful. Still, I don't see why you want to go actin' so foolish over nothin'."

"Well, Gib," replied the engineer, "I may be crazy, but I ain't no fool, and if there's a dead whale around the ship, I can come pretty near smelin' it. I tell you, Gib, that Tabu-Tabu nigger had a look in his eye for all the world like a cur dog lickin' a bone. I ain't takin' no chances. My old man used to say: 'Bart, whatever you do, alers have an anchor out to windward.'"

"By the left hind leg of the Great Sacred Bull," snapped Captain Scraggs, "if you ain't enough to precipitate war."

"War," replied McGuffey, "is my long suit—particularly war with native niggers. I just naturally crave to punch the ear of anything darker than a Portuguese. Remember how I cleaned out the police department of Panama?"

"Mount the guns if you're goin' to, Mac. If not, for the love of the Lord don't be demoralizin' the crew with this talk of war. All I ask is that you set the guns after I've finished my business here with Tabu-Tabu. He's been on a war vessel, and knows what guns are, and if he saw you mountin' them it might break up our friendly relations. He'll think we don't trust him."

"Well, we don't," replied McGuffey, doggedly.

"Well, we do," snapped Captain Scraggs.

There is always something connected with the use of that pronoun of kings which eats like a canker at the heart of men of the McGuffey breed. That officer now spat on the deck, in defiance of the rules of his superior officers, and glared at Captain Scraggs.

"Speak for yourself, you miserable little wart," he roared. "If you include me on that cannibals' visitin' list, and go to contradictin' me agin, I'll—"

"Mac," interrupted Mr. Gibney, angrily, "control yourself. It's agin the rules to have rag-chewin' and back-bitin' on the Maggie II. Remember our motto: 'All for one and one for all'—"

"Here comes that sneakin' bushy-headed murderer back to the vessel," interrupted McGuffey. "I wonder what devilment he's up to now."

Mr. McGuffey was partly right, for in a few minutes Tabu-Tabu came along-side, climbed aboard, and salaamed. Mr. Gibney, fearful of McGuffey's inability to control his antipathy for the race, beckoned Captain Scraggs and Tabu-Tabu to follow him down into the cabin. Meanwhile, McGuffey contented himself by parading backward and forward across the forecastle head with a Mauser rifle in the hollow of his arm and his person fairly bristling with pistols and cutlasses. Whenever one of the flotilla of canoes showed to a respectful distance, he hovered signs of crossing an imaginary deadline drawn by McGuffey, he would point his rifle at them and swear horribly. He scowled at Tabu-Tabu when that individual finally emerged from the conference with Mr. Gibney and Scraggs and went over the side to his waiting canoe.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)